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AUTHOR Toth, F. D.; Good, J. W.; DuCharme, A.; Dixey, B.
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the design and implementation of a graduate program delivery model in educational leadership with a curriculum collaboratively developed by a university and a high school. The goal of the program was to build faculty capacity at the high school by designing and implementing a graduate program around the school improvement plan. Collaboration was necessary at each step, from conducting needs assessment, to enrolling students, to designing the work each semester. Implemented during spring 1998, the program has a cohort of high school staff members enrolled in graduate study at the master's and specialist levels in three majors, one of which is educational leadership. The program is delivered on the participating school's campus. Only graduate students employed at the participating school are enrolled in the program. This paper describes the concept and program goals, collaborative agreements for responsibility, support from the university and the school, and the model developed for enhancing and sustaining faculty capacity for school improvement. The paper also describes the supporting research, needs assessment results, graduate curriculum development and implementation, lessons learned for higher education, evaluation plan, and proposed actions for dissemination. Though there were barriers to program success, leadership from the university and the school prevailed in securing a graduate program on the high school campus. (Contains 8 references.) (SM)

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Running head: Educational Leadership Preparation

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Educational Leadership Preparation for School Improvement

F. D. Toth, J. W. Good, A. DuCharme, and B. Dixey

Valdosta State University

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe the design and implementation of a graduate program delivery model in educational leadership with a curriculum collaboratively developed by a university and a high school. Implemented during spring, 1998 the program has a cohort of high school staff members enrolled in graduate study at the masters and specialist levels in three majors, one of which is educational leadership. The program is delivered on the participating school's campus. Only graduate students employed at the participating school are enrolled in the program. Described in the paper are the concept and program goals, collaborative agreements for responsibility and support from the university and the school as well as the model developed for enhancing and sustaining faculty capacity for school improvement. Additional components described are the supporting research, needs assessment results, graduate curriculum development and implementation, lessons learned for higher education, evaluation plan, and proposed actions for dissemination.

Educational Leadership Preparation for School Improvement

The design and implementation of a graduate program delivery model in educational leadership will vary depending upon how its founders use collaboration and how they delineate the goals of the program. This preparation program began with an invitation to area schools from the dean of the university's school of education to commit to a new form of graduate study. The invitation included the provision that the graduate program must be designed around the school's improvement plan with the long-range goal being to raise student achievement. Further, the school and the university would collaboratively develop the graduate curriculum. Implemented in spring, 1998, the program has a cohort of high school staff members enrolled in graduate study in three majors, one of which is educational leadership. The program is delivered on the participating school's campus. Only graduate students at the participating school are enrolled in the program.

Described in the paper are the concept and program goals, collaborative agreements for responsibility and support from the university and the school as well as the model developed for enhancing and sustaining faculty capacity for school improvement. Additional components described are the supporting research, needs assessment results, graduate curriculum development and implementation, lessons learned for higher education, evaluation plan, and proposed actions for dissemination.

Concept

This program is designed to provide a high school faculty and administration with knowledge, skills, and abilities that will help them address the organizational needs of the school and the instructional needs of their students. One finding of the needs

assessment was little correlation between how teachers perceived their training and how they actually delivered instruction in the classroom, thus having implications for how leadership addressed school improvement through instructional delivery.

Program Goal

The goal of the graduate program is to improve high school student achievement by addressing the objectives of the school improvement plan. This will be done by increasing the capacity of the school's faculty and administration on eleven dimensions related to overall school performance and effective schools research.

Capacity Model

In this program, capacity is the capability of a building faculty and administration to improve student achievement specified in the improvement plan as a result of their knowledge, skills, and abilities (Good, 1998). Although the term has been used in different contexts in effective schools research, no prior definition of capacity has been identified in the literature in this area. Reynolds (1997) identified eleven dimensions of capacity that serve as the precepts of shared decision making and are expressed as seven environmental indicators and four instructional delivery models. The environmental dimensions include the areas of leadership, power, the instructional guidance system, resources, rewards/incentives, information, and knowledge. The instructional delivery dimensions include the use of technology, integrated approaches, educating all students, and teaching for understanding. A model of school capacity (Good, 1998) has been developed for clarification (see Figure 1).

SCHOOL CAPACITY

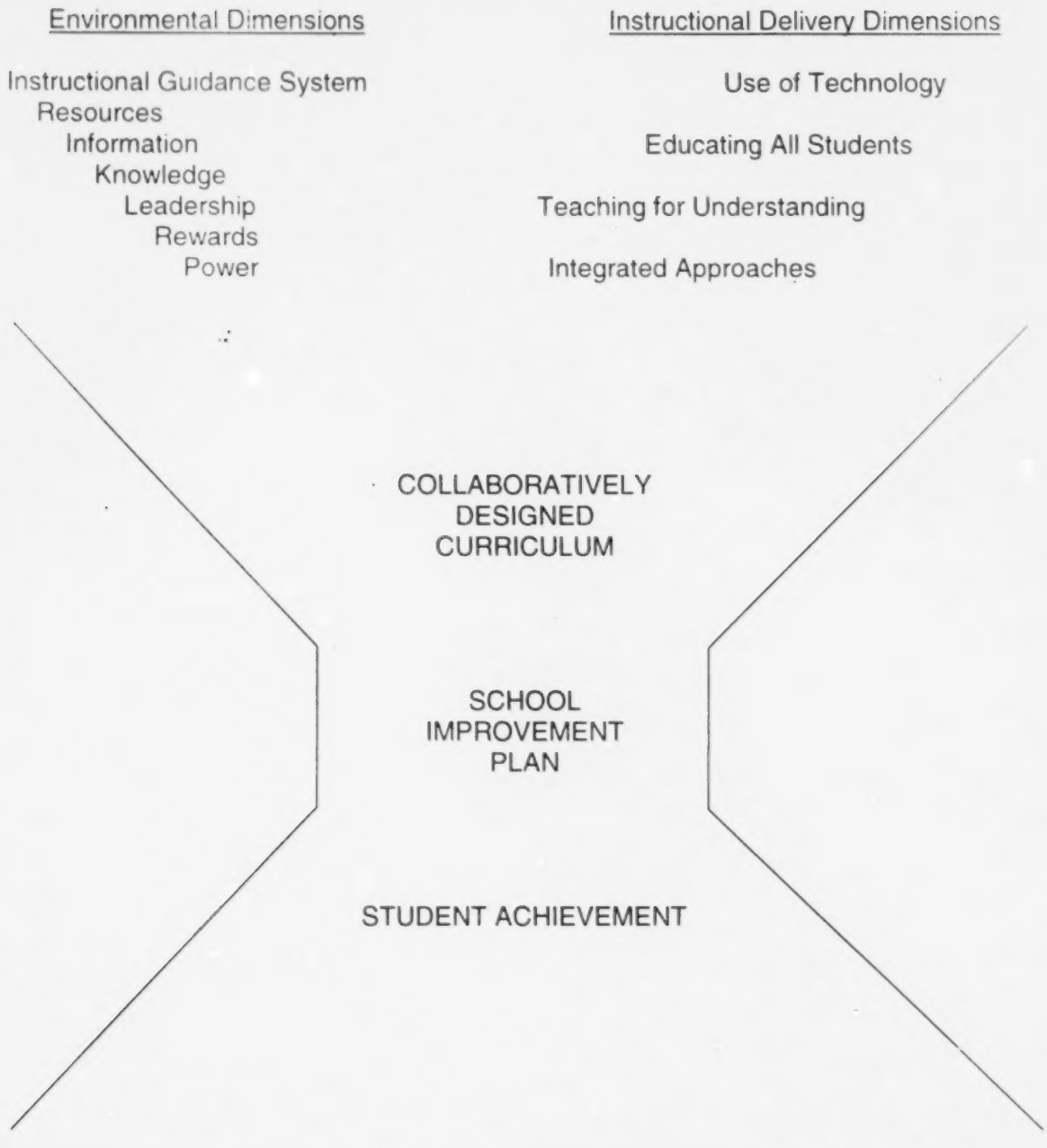

Figure 1. School Capacity Model

Graduate Curriculum

No changes were made in the programs of study at either the masters or specialist level for educational leadership. Within the syllabus for each course in the program, university faculty consult with the school improvement team and the graduate cohort to develop consensus on the course activities and evaluation procedures. Activities and evaluation procedures must contribute to better understanding of school and student needs as addressed in the school improvement plan and contribute to the critical area of teamwork skills needed by school faculty and administration to sustain school improvement after the graduate program is officially completed. Assessments are generally product driven and may include teams of graduate students engaged in activities such as writing grant proposals for the school. Where possible, courses are integrated to bring students together as part of the teamwork development and continued review of the school improvement plan. Additionally, results of a faculty survey targeted graduate curriculum needs for overall improved capacity of the school to engage in school improvement.

Evaluation Plan

This pilot program is helping educators develop improved solutions to the problems they encounter each day. The primary program objective is to improve the capacity of the school faculty and administration by providing training, resources and support for classroom teachers within the focus of the school improvement plan. This objective will be measured by comparison of quantitative and qualitative research concerning faculty perceptions on the eleven dimensions of capacity and the success of program graduates in terms of number of degrees awarded, number of administrative

certificates granted, and self study reports of sustained collaboration among faculty. These measurements will benchmark trends and determine if teachers perceive a connection between the graduate program/staff development and how they deliver instruction, the key to staff development having an impact on student achievement. Additionally, the results of research concerning the impact of capacity on student achievement will be delineated and presented.

The secondary program objective is the long-range improvement of student achievement. Student achievement will be measured in several ways. The first way to measure the objectives is through an improvement in test scores. Student performance on the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency (TAP), passing rates for regular program eleventh-graders for the state graduation test, and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores will be compiled. Additionally, the graduation rate and dropout rate will be examined for trends.

Collaborative Agreements

Prior to implementation of the program, the dean of the school of education led the development of written agreements between university faculty and members of the school improvement team including the principal and the chair of the team. Among the agreements were the following: (a) the program would be delivered on the high school campus; (b) the numbers of students participating would be sufficient to support faculty assignments to the program; (c) only teachers and administrators employed at the school would be enrolled; (d) curriculum would be determined collaboratively by the university faculty, the school improvement team, and the graduate students; (e) class activities and assessments would be aligned with objectives in the school improvement

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plan: (f) staff development activities at the school would be coordinated to provide teachers not in the graduate program with staff development credit for selected school wide activities, and (g) programs of study would remain unchanged for numbers of hours and specific course requirements.

Review of Literature

There appears to be support for attributing increased student achievement to increased levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities among the faculty and administration. This program uses graduate study, supplemented by staff development credit for teachers not enrolled in the program, as the delivery model for improving the capacity of the faculty to engage in school improvement.

Best Practices for Sustainable Improvement

In a congressionally mandated national study (Quellmatz et al., 1992) staff training and development was the most common strategy used to support school reform. This strategy was used by 82% of the 1550 school districts surveyed. The study did not indicate if any collaboration was present in the development of curricula, but did cite that some courses may have been held at the school site. The Council for School Performance (Harkreader and Weathersby, 1998) found that some of the variation in student performance for Georgia students could be explained by the different ways that schools conducted their training and staff development. Although similar activities may have taken place in both effective and less-effective schools, in effective schools staff acted collegially and concentrated on student performance as an outcome. Additionally, Bauer and Mitchell (1997) found that in successful districts, most persons cited an emphasis on professional development as well as higher trust levels, greater teamwork,

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and encouragement to try new strategies. A corollary to the focus on student achievement seems to be that there has been significant difficulty in using training and leadership development to transfer what we know about effective schools into practice (Holcomb, 1993). In particular, graduate training in educational leadership has had little impact on helping schools create those characteristics associated with effective schools that have high student achievement (Haller, Brent, & McNamara, 1997). To improve leadership, teamwork, and collaboration skills, the largest number of graduate students participating in the program are in educational leadership.

Results

The program began with each member of the high school faculty completing a needs assessment survey. The survey instrument (Reynolds, 1997) was designed to determine the perceived strength of the eleven dimensions of capacity. This instrument will be administered again at the completion of the program. Other trend data will be compiled at the completion of the program on the assessment measures previously mentioned.

Needs Assessment

In the findings of the needs assessment study conducted prior to program implementation, the lowest mean scores were in the dimensions of resources and use of technology (see Chart 1). The highest mean scores were in knowledge/staff development and in the instructional guidance system used at the school.

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Chart 1. High School Mean Scores

Dimensions	Mean	SD*
Leadership	4.49	0.68
Instructional Guidance System	4.59	0.80
Resources	3.79	0.84
Knowledge	4.62	0.78
Information	4.07	0.63
Rewards	4.14	0.74
Power	3.91	0.73
Educating All Students	4.06	0.76
Integrated Approaches	4.08	0.63
Use of Technology	3.59	0.74
Teaching for Understanding	4.01	0.86

In examining the strength of the relationships among the various dimensions examined, a weak correlation was found between how teachers perceived staff development and how they perceived educating all students, teaching for understanding, use of technology, and integrated approaches. Teachers perceived little connection between what they knew and how they taught. There was a strong correlation between how the staff perceived leadership and how they perceived the instructional guidance system of the school (see Chart 2). Additional research is needed to benchmark progress and to improve the understanding of the relationship between capacity measures and student achievement.

Teamwork

A major component of sustaining change at the school appeared at the beginning of the program to be independent of the curriculum. Since the first course taught at the school, teamwork has become an obvious factor in the work that the graduate students accomplish both in the program and in school improvement activities for the school. At the beginning of the program, members of the high school staff needed time

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Chart 2. High School Correlations Among Dimensions of Capacity

	Instructional Delivery Models				Environmental Indicators						
	EAS	IA	UT	TU	L	IGS	RES	K	I	REW	P
EAS	1.00	0.53*	0.43	0.59*	0.33*	0.50*	0.42*	0.18	0.43*	0.41*	0.40*
IA		1.00	0.30*	0.63*	0.35*	0.49*	0.43*	0.21	0.54*	0.19	0.40*
UT			1.00	0.38*	0.41*	0.47*	0.23	0.30*	0.40*	0.40*	0.41*
TU				1.00	0.26*	0.46*	0.30*	0.03	0.46*	0.20	0.41*
L					1.00	0.79*	0.64*	0.64*	0.75*	0.53*	0.76*
IGS						1.00	0.56*	0.52*	0.81*	0.52*	0.76*
RES							1.00	0.28*	0.57*	0.41*	0.62*
K								1.00	0.50*	0.36*	0.48*
I									1.00	0.39*	0.85*
REW										1.00	0.54*
P											1.00

*p<.01 ** p<.05 (2 tailed)

Dimensions of Capacity Legend:

EAS = Educating All Students IA = Integrated Approaches UT = Use of Technology
TU = Teaching for Understanding L = Leadership IGS = Instructional Guidance System
RES = Resources K = Knowledge I = Information REW = Rewards P = Power

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to learn the names of the other persons in the class who also worked at the school. Graduate students now look for opportunities to work together and have perceived that the evidence of effective teamwork has increased. Specifically, they believe that their results are better when they work together than when they work independently. All graduate work at the school now includes components of teamwork in course syllabi.

Barriers

This program has been successful because the leadership of the university facilitated program startup. By the time the team of university and school staff had determined what would be taught during the first semester of operation, the timelines for enrollment, course offerings, and registration were all passed. The key was that the participants needed the coursework offered as they had one semester to get ready for block teaching.

Additionally, the program had little initial appeal among university faculty not involved in the delivery. Among high school staff, a common perception hindering the startup was that the university would not actually conduct such a program.

Lessons Learned

In reviewing the success of this program, there were two major contributing factors. First, the vision and commitment of the dean of the college of education to the program and to overall school improvement was the foundation for all subsequent success. Additionally, the dean of the graduate school facilitated enrollment processes to allow a program start that was critical

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for school operation but requiring extra work for standard university processes. Additionally, the leadership of the school, including principal and school improvement team chair, shared a vision to improve school capacity and were willing to promote the program.

Proposed Dissemination

This program was initiated as a pilot project. Replication has been planned, given that other schools have expressed interest in having an on-site graduate program. Obviously, the size of the school must be sufficient to justify the allocation of university resources. Additionally, the program will evolve so that coursework can be built around a standards based program.

Conclusions

The goal of this graduate program was to build faculty capacity at a high school by designing and implementing a graduate program around the school improvement plan. Collaboration was needed at each step from conducting a needs assessment to enrolling students to designing the work each semester to meet the rigor of graduate study and the rigor of school improvement. Although barriers to program success were encountered, leadership from the university and from the school prevailed in securing a graduate program on the high school campus.

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